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SUBJECT: PDAS KIRBY ADDRESSES FRUSTRATIONS OF MOROCCO'S BUSINESS
COMMUNITY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Moroccan-American Chamber of Commerce in Morocco (AmCham) hosted a business lunch March 2 for PDAS Michael Kirby of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. The event was attended by 56 business men and women representing numerous industry sectors. AmCham Board Members, the Consul General, and the Senior Commercial Officer also participated in the lunch, which was covered extensively in the local press. The business community used the forum to vent their frustrations with long delays and impersonal treatment by U.S. officials at ports of entry. PDAS Kirby stressed that the U.S. believes in treating individuals with dignity and noted that he and Assistant Secretary Jacobs were discussing issues such as the ones raised by the group at high levels in Washington. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PDAS Kirby (in Casablanca to participate in a regional Consular Leadership Development Course) began with a general overview of the Bureau of Consular Affairs' efforts to improve handling of business visa requests around the world. He described CA's use of IT to upgrade and streamline the processing of visa requests. He stressed the necessity of high-quality visa interview and of shortening the waiting period for clearances. He also noted that this needed to be balanced with keeping out individuals threatening to U.S. national security. He noted the important contributions that trade and investment make to Morocco's and the U.S. economy and the key element that travel by Moroccans to the U.S. made to enhancing economic ties.

¶3. (SBU) During the question and answer period, several senior company executives representing U.S. firms in Morocco raised serious concerns about exceedingly long delays at the port of entry which often caused missed connecting flights, without explanation for the hold up, and involved highly personal questioning or requests for passwords to access personal computers. Others mentioned the inconsistent guidance given to travelers by immigration officials and airlines concerning NSEERS exit registration processing and penalties.

¶4. (SBU) PDAS Kirby noted that in many instances, such additional processing at the port of entry was justified. He stated that the U.S. believes in treating individuals with dignity. He also said that he and Assistant Secretary Jacobs were discussing issues such as these at high levels in Washington.

¶5. (SBU) The participants noted that the U.S. is one of the few countries that issues tourist and business visas to Moroccans for 10 years. PDAS Kirby added that unlike many other countries, the U.S. does not require visitors to register once they have been admitted. Thus, while the entry process might take longer than for travel to other destinations, it is still a single process and does not require multiple steps. One participant countered that when you have countries like Turkey, to which Moroccans can travel without a visa, that are in close proximity and ready to roll out the red

carpet to do business, it creates much greater incentives to conduct business with them rather than with potential prospects in the U.S. PDAS Kirby responded that each country's immigration system is based on its needs and its culture and that ours reflects who we are. He stressed that we want Moroccans to visit the U.S. and to feel welcome in our country.

¶6. (SBU) The discussion moved beyond personal accounts and touched on ways to remove obstacles to bilateral business. The CG recounted her experience with the business community in India where a bilateral, high-level business committee had very successfully identified six concrete ways to remove objectives to bilateral trade. The group thought this initiative should be replicated with representatives from the Moroccan and U.S. business communities.

¶7. (SBU) Another participant recommended that the AmCham send a delegation comprised of business representatives to Washington to take the message to the White House and to Congress about the need to revise and improve entry and exit procedures. PDAS Kirby noted that AmChams around the world play an important role in promoting U.S. exports and that appropriately coordinated suggestions on how to encourage U.S. trade could be useful, but he stopped short of making any comment on the efficacy of any message.

¶8. PDAS Kirby cleared this cable.

MILLARD